# WHERE DOES THE SALT GO AFTER THE SNOW MELTS?

## Winter Weather Fun & Safety

Winter is a wonderful time of year to enjoy family and the warmth of home as the snow begins to fall and accumulate outside. With the accumulation of snow, outdoor activities like sledding, ice skating, and skiing can be enjoyed by all who are adventurous enough to brave the frigid weather and potentially slippery roads. Luckily, municipalities are well equipped for the winter season and are able to respond with snow plows and salt trucks to clear the roads and make our travels a little easier - and much safer.

Similarly, individuals often respond to the accumulation of snow in the same way as municipalities do; they shovel the snow and spread large amounts of salt to deter ice from forming. This practice is effective and allows for safe passage on sidewalks, steps, and driveways but it comes at a price. The salt we spread doesn't just disappear once the snow melts, in fact, that's when the salt begins its journey into our waterways.

## Salt. Hero or Villain?

When the snow melts, the resulting water dissolves the salt into sodium and chloride which is then carried away through stormwater drains. The water containing the sodium and chloride then works it's way through the stormwater system and is released into nearby rivers, streams, and lakes without being treated. This untreated water increases the levels of sodium and chloride in the river, stream, or lake in which it is released. High content levels of these chemicals can be toxic to aquatic life and negatively impact our ecosystem.

This year alone, more than 22 million tons of salt will be used for deicing during the winter months. That is the equivalent of approximately 137 pounds of salt for every person in the United States. Considering the amount of salt used in one year, its no surprise that scientists have witnessed an increase of sodium and chloride levels in our waterways year after year. One study, done over a 46 year period, discovered sodium and chloride levels increased by 130 and 243 percent respectively in the Mohawk River in Upstate New York. A similar study estimated that 40 percent of our country's urban streams have chloride levels exceeding safe guidelines and that 91 percent of that chloride is directly linked to deicing activity.

> "High levels of sodium and chloride can be toxic to aquatic life"

The good news is, we can reduce the impact that salt has on our waterways by simply using salt more sparingly. One way we can do this is by clearing our sidewalks, steps, and driveways early and more often. Doing so will prevent snow from compacting and ice from forming. In the case that ice does form, sand and other alternatives can be used to melt snow and provide traction.

## How we can help

- Shovel early and often
- Dump shoveled snow into a vegetated area to prevent excessive runoff into the storm drain.
- Use a salt alternatives for deicing such as sand, ash, or cat litter.
- Limit home access to one entrance to reduce your the area you'll need to deice.
- Use commercial car washes to remove accumulated salt off of your vehicle.

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# WHERE DOES THE SALT GO AFTER THE SNOW MELTS?

Salt is used by municipalities and individuals to prevent the accumulation of snow and ice. This year alone, 22 million tons of salt will be used across the country for the purpose of deicing; the equivalent of 137 pounds per person in the United States. Sodium and chloride, the main components of salt, can be toxic to aquatic life, vegetation, animals, and humans. Help reduce the impact of salt on our environment this winter.

## Reduce your salt use:

- Shovel early and often during winter weather events
- Dump shoveled snow into a vegetated area to prevent excessive runoff into the storm drain.
- Use a salt alternatives for deicing such as sand, ash, or cat litter.
- Limit home access to one entrance to reduce the area you'll need to treat.
- Use commercial car washes to remove accumulated salt off of your vehicle.

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